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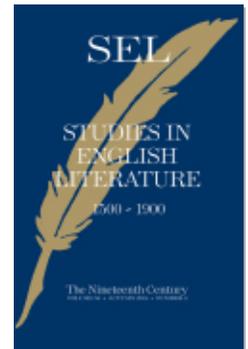
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John Clare's Manuscript Translations of Byron and the Bible

STEPHANIE KUDUK WEINER

Rewriting was John Clare's main poetic project in 1841. Over the course of the year, he wrote two dozen verse paraphrases of the King James Bible, reworking long passages of scripture into a series of poems that closely echo, reshape, and subtly reorient his originals. He called these poems "Hebrew Melodies," borrowing a title from George Gordon, Lord Byron's 1815 collection of lyrics, some of which had also been modeled on the Old Testament.¹ During these same months, Clare was also working on two other long poems with titles and metrical forms drawn from Byron: "Child Harold" and "Don Juan a Poem."² In these works, Clare rewrites Byron's poems for himself in order to present his own experience of communion with nature, lost love, and exile.

All three of these poems declare their origin in other texts. Rather than claiming originality, they proclaim their derivation from other works of literature. Yet they all depart from their sources, altering their words and ideas, even their situations and scenes. The resulting poems are neither *sui generis* creations nor direct reproductions, neither fully original nor fully derivative. Clare's poems simultaneously interpret and create. They work with and through their sources to do something that blurs the lines between reading and writing, audience and author, and imitation

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and invention. They show with unusual clarity that in art "the advent of the new is a particular kind of refashioning of the old."³

Scholars have recognized that the lessons Clare learned in these three poems bore new fruit throughout his later works, particularly in his use of sublimity and what Mark Minor calls his "psychological apocalypticism."⁴ Careful work has also been done on the biographical significance of Clare's poetic "impersonations" of Byron and his lifelong engagement with the Bible.⁵ What interests me here is something different: how Clare's poems of 1841 explore both originality and imitation by occupying a gray area where the two obviously overlap. In my view, this exploration yields three insights about Clare's view and practice of writing. First, English, Clare's mother tongue, is neither singular nor static. He investigates this by homing in on the syntactic and lexical features of "formal Church English," the elevated style of Byron's Spenserian stanzas, and the colloquial, even vulgar idiom of *Don Juan*, and by integrating each of these registers into his own idiolect.⁶ Second, reading and composing—and, by extension, responding and creating—happen together. This simultaneity is clear in the contrast between the fidelity of the biblical paraphrases and the liberty of "Child Harold" and "Don Juan," which reveal from opposite ends of the spectrum how writers refashion materials they have been given. Third, the literary text, if it is alive, is not fixed but malleable. Clare confers life upon his source texts by treating them as invitations for rewriting.

In the nineteenth century, one label for the gray area where originality and imitation operate in tandem would have been "translation." Paraphrase and imitation had long been defined as central modes of literary translation, and the Romantic era was a great age for experiments in intralingual transfer, from William Wordsworth's minimally modernizing translations of Chaucer to novels and poems peppered with Scots. Such experiments demonstrated how many varieties of English there were and had been, as well as how valuable these varieties were as a literary resource. Ideas about translation in the nineteenth century were not so narrowly focused on carrying over the meaning of a text from a foreign language as they are in the popular use of the term today; intralingual paraphrase and imitation were understood within complex conceptual frameworks that had grown up in discussions of many types of rewriting. Crucially, such discussions were a privileged site for rejecting the law of polarity that governed discussions of imitation and invention in aesthetic theory in the wake of Edward Young's "hugely influential" *Conjectures*

on *Original Composition* (1759).⁷ While Young saw imitation as the opposite of originality, commentators on translations were fascinated by the creative work of even the most faithful translator as well as the debts owed by even the most inventive imitator. Indeed, Romantic translation theories, which placed a high value on “foreignizing” translations, collapsed the distinction itself by exploring how stringent efforts to reproduce a text could lead writers to discover inventive ways of using their own language.⁸

Scholars have never considered Clare a translator, but nineteenth-century translation theorists would have done so. By following their lead, I bring to his poems the insights of translation studies, with its nimble take on textuality and rewriting and its interest not only in “language” in the abstract but also in “English” in particular.⁹ English required or enabled intralingual translation because of its historical and regional variations, and nineteenth-century literary English, Clare’s chosen artistic medium, was especially notable for its inclusivity and multivocality. In the wake of eighteenth-century standardization, which codified Standard English as the prestige sociolect of print and literature, Romantic and Victorian authors remade the literary language by filling their ambitious, emphatically literary texts with all manner of nonstandard varieties of English.¹⁰ This multilingual conception of literary English redefined the prestige sociolect in terms of its capacity to contain multitudes, to make aesthetic use of the history and multiplicity of English.

Another possible label for the gray area where originality and imitation work together would be “manuscript.” The poems at issue here existed in Clare’s lifetime only in handwritten manuscripts that he may or may not have intended for eventual publication. Their status as poetic texts is necessarily equivocal and undetermined, and they remain forever open rather than closed by publication.¹¹ As a result, whatever Clare’s intentions may have been, his paraphrases and imitations correspond more nearly to the protocols of manuscript culture than of print culture, and that fact lends a particular power to his writing. In a manuscript culture, open texts “invite or require collaboration, amplification, embellishment, illustration to disclose the hidden or the as-yet-unthought-of.”¹² As Gerald L. Bruns explains, “in a manuscript culture the text is not reducible to the letter ... which is why we are privileged to read between the lines, and not to read between them only but to write between them as well, because the text is simply not complete,” not closed and finalized.¹³ Clare writes “with the creative freedom that collectors and imitators in the sys-

tem of manuscript transmission felt free to exercise."¹⁴ His open manuscript poems thus also convert Byron's published poems and the King James Bible into open texts. In a sense, they return them to manuscript form by writing them again in Clare's own handwritten versions. However faithful to their sources, however inventive, they make those sources writerly rather than readerly texts. The Bible and Byron's poems become for Clare, to borrow a phrase from Roland Barthes, "*ourselves writing*."¹⁵

In his biblical paraphrases, Clare reproduces scripture for himself. He steps into the texts and writes in the voices of David, Isaiah, Habakkuk, and many other poets and prophets. He writes their poems again, using many of the same words as the King James Bible (sometimes in the same order), the same similes and metaphors, the same paratactic syntax, the same images, and the same overall structures of beginning, middle, and end. Yet even as he inhabits their poems, he draws them into his own oeuvre as well. His feelings fuse with theirs. Their history is made to shed light on his experience and vice versa. Their world of thunderstorms, whirlwinds, skies, and valleys is at once far away and right here, populated by fens and green rivers as well as cedar forests and deserts. This simultaneous recreation and incorporation occurs line by line, stanza by stanza. Clare typically begins very close to the source text and introduces additions and alterations as a line or stanza comes to an end. This means that his inventions are strongly tied to rhyme and versification, and that poetic experiment and spiritual exercise propel one another.

It is this inextricably writerly and religious practice that puts all biblical paraphrases in motion. Like hymns, paraphrases are religious experiences and "hermeneutical acts" through which "the believer attempts to understand the created world, his or her own place in it, and the Divine."¹⁶ Like other poems, they are creative acts in which "poetic thinking" and "poetic *making*" go hand in hand.¹⁷ And like other translations, they "go beyond the appropriation of content to a releasing of those linguistic and aesthetic energies that heretofore had existed only as pure possibility in one's own language."¹⁸ Such has been the case throughout the long history of biblical paraphrase in English, which stretches back to poems by the seventh-century monk Cædmon.¹⁹ As soon as there was English poetry, there were biblical paraphrases. Clare's poems belong to a glorious era of verse paraphrases that began in the mid-eighteenth century with the growing reputation of the King James Bible as a literary masterpiece and the "rediscovery of biblical poetry" by Robert Lowth in *Lectures on the*

Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (1753).²⁰ In paraphrasing the Bible, Clare brings himself into conversation not only with David and Jeremiah but also with this whole tradition of biblical exegesis and imitation, which included some of his favorite writers, from Isaac Watts and William Cowper to Byron.

No direct evidence exists that Clare had read Lowth's book, but he "certainly knew of discussions" of it.²¹ Most crucially, he owned a copy of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1785), which provides a thorough digest of Lowth's arguments.²² The cornerstone of Hebrew poetry in Lowth's eyes was a semantic pattern of corresponding units, "parallelism": "in two lines (or members of the same period) things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each other by a kind of rule or measure."²³ For Blair and Lowth, parallelism fostered verse that was "simple and concise" and, as a result, especially "sublime," passionate, and direct.²⁴ Another aspect of the Bible's simplicity lay in its concrete images and similes, which were thought to arise from "the natural objects of their own country ... and the arts and employments of their common life ... [as] a people chiefly occupied with agriculture and pasturage."²⁵ As Sarah Houghton-Walker writes, Lowth "identified the way in which Old Testament imagery invested the very ordinary with great dignity."²⁶

For Clare, as for most commentators and poets during these years, the Old Testament was the "gravitational center for the poetic Bible."²⁷ He chose to translate exactly the books that Lowth and Blair identify as the most "poetical" parts of scripture: "the book of Job, the Psalms of David, the Song of Solomon, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, a great part of the prophetic writings, and [similar] passages scattered occasionally through the historical books."²⁸ Similarly, Clare's description of his childhood reading is very much of a piece with the tradition of Lowth and Blair: "the bible and Prayer Book, the prophetic parts of the former, with the fine hebrew Poem of Job, and the prayers and simple translations of the Psalms."²⁹ So is his statement in his journal that "the more I read the scriptures the more I feel astonishment at the sublime images I continually meet with in its Poetical and prophetic books."³⁰ Sublime, simple, Hebrew poem—these are Lowth's and Blair's key words.

Clare's paraphrases are not straightforward modernizations. Where the King James Bible features archaic pronouns and verb forms, Clare usually retains them. Indeed, he preserves them even when he changes the word order or syntax of a clause. For

instance, in his version of the opening verse of Isaiah 47, he changes "for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate" to "Thou art the tender & delicate no more" (47:1; and p. 140).³¹ His insertions too are in this style: "Thy inmost shame is seen / Reverse thy every plan" and "No wickedness on earth can thee defend" (pp. 140–1). Similarly, Clare retains the Bible's distinctive "'noun + of + noun' constructions" such as "rod of his wrath" (p. 143).³² Indeed, he likes such phrases so much that he sometimes uses them where the Bible has not, for instance changing "dark places" to "places of darkness" and "The sun ariseth" to "at rise of the sun" (Lam. 3:6; p. 143; and Ps. 104:22; p. 139). Such details show Clare assimilating himself into what Stephen Prickett calls "formal Church English."

This formality ensures that even the most ordinary objects and scenes are invested with dignity. "He shall pour water out of his buckets" (p. 107), Clare writes in his paraphrase of Numbers 24, almost exactly reproducing the Authorized Version (24:7). At their best, Clare's paraphrases amplify or highlight this effect, as in this translation of Psalm 102:

My bones like hearth stones burn away
My life like vapoury smoke decays

My heart is smitten like the grass
That withered lies & dead
& I so lost to what I was
Forget to eat my bread.

(p. 137)

Here he introduces both rhyme and anaphora, as well as the whole line "& I so lost to what I was." But he keeps the original's semantic parallelism, simple and forceful rhythms, and sublime and concrete imagery. Old Testament poetry was written in a formal, prestigious register that was also emphatically, on various levels, a vernacular. It was a language Clare had known from infancy, but it also remained foreign, full of resources not yet tapped. In his paraphrases, he translates between this English and his own idiolect, at once preserving and incorporating its strangeness. His versions of Psalm 102 and Isaiah 47 are recognizably drawn from the King James Bible and from his notebooks.

In many ways, the idiom of Clare's "Don Juan" is the antithesis of formal Church English. Byron's poem "presents a striking combination of the conversationally offhand and the elaborately

rhetorical” and moves in swift, “bathetic descent[s] from high to low style.”³³ Clare’s poem tries to be conversationally offhand in a low style and manages mainly to be “coarse” and “salacious” and to prove how difficult multisyllabic rhymes are.³⁴ By no measure is the poem a success, and it is unsurprising that he seems to have worked on it for only a few weeks before abandoning it in favor of “Child Harold” and the biblical paraphrases. But the vulgarity of “Don Juan” is important to Clare’s exploration of competing versions of English. He distills the uncouth vocabulary and chatty chumminess of Byron’s poem into a deliberately vulgar register that makes room for profanity, sexual jokes, and crude puns:

I wish small beer was half as good as whiskey
 & married dames with buggers would not mingle
 There’s some too cunning far & some too frisky
 & here I want a rhyme—so write down “jingle”
 & there’s such putting in—in whores crim con
 Some mouths would eat forever & eat on.

(lines 59–64)

There is nothing dignified about these everyday items, actions, or feelings, or about the task of writing poems about them. The couplet contains an allusion to Byron’s line “*crim. con.* with the married” and its use of the abbreviation for criminal conversation, a legal term for adultery.³⁵

Clare’s inclusion of his speaker among the lawyers who knew about such suits and the upper-class claimants who brought them reveals the elite linguistic resonance of this vulgar tongue. “Routs Masques & Balls—I wish they were a dream,” his speaker cries at another point, lamenting his habitual familiarity with such festivities (line 46). The following lines correspondingly differentiate him from “poor men” and the very different set of hopes he harbors for them: “I wish for poor men luck—an honest praxis / Cheap food & cloathing—no corn laws or taxes” (lines 47–8). Such passages reveal, perhaps surprisingly, that this vulgar sociolect carried associations not only with the language really, or supposedly, used by men in general but more specifically with elite men whose speech was unconstrained by norms of bourgeois respectability. Clare’s capacity to ventriloquize it signals his membership in the class of authors such as Byron who were outspoken opponents of fashionable or pious cant.³⁶

If in “Don Juan” Clare pivots away from the Bible and its variety of English, then in “Child Harold” he pivots back. The gram-

matical markers of formal Church English appear throughout the poem, as do themes, landscape elements, and key ideas from the paraphrases. In a passage about God's language, for example, he writes, "Thus saith the great & high & lofty one / Whose name is holy" (lines 375–6). Similarly, in a description of his lost beloved he says, "Thy beauty made youths life divine / Till my soul grew a part of thine" (lines 353–4). This shared idiom is one of the signs that Clare was working on both sequences simultaneously, as his manuscripts make abundantly clear.³⁷ Indeed, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* seems to have offered Clare another way to fuse the formality of prestige with the simplicity of the colloquial. More precisely, it offered Clare two such ways, the first in the poem's lyrical interludes and the second in its finely patterned texture of Spenserian stanzas. In his own lyrical interludes, which Clare employs far more often than Byron, he crafts complex, subtle stanzas using only a handful of unostentatious words and an unassuming meter. At their simplest, such poems seem like raw expressions of emotional suffering; at their most abstract, they present the reader with riddles about how grief alters the experience of time and space.³⁸ They approach formality from a grounding in colloquial simplicity.

Clare's modified Spenserian stanzas are much more formal, and this effect is amplified by the contrast between their rhetorical, deliberately literary complexity and the homespun simplicity of the songs they surround.³⁹ Indeed, the Spenserian stanzas in "Child Harold" are more consistently formal in their syntax and lineation than anything else Clare ever wrote. This makes their debt to their source text highly significant, revealing how here, as in the biblical paraphrases and "Don Juan," Clare concentrates features of each variety of English in order to explore what it can do. The most striking characteristic of these stanzas is his rare use of strong enjambments:

I sigh for one & two—& still I sigh
 For many are the whispers I have heard
 From beautys lips—loves soul in many an eye
 Hath pierced my heart with such intense regard.
(lines 181–4)

In this passage, as is typical in "Child Harold," medial dashes mark the beginning of a clause that stretches into one or two further lines. Only by reading through to the next dash or the implied full stop can readers discern what role the initial clause plays in the

sentence. Multiple meanings accrue along the way. The first line seems complete and balanced between “I sigh” and “still I sigh.” Only when we read on do we grasp the tension between sighing “for one & two” and sighing “For many,” and only later do we see that the second “For” actually means “because.”

A few stanzas have no medial dashes at all, which makes the multiplication of meaning even more disorienting. In this example, I have added dashes between sentences:

England my country[—]though my setting sun
 Sinks in the ocean gloom & dregs of life
 My muse can sing[—]my Marys heart was won
 & joy was heaven when I called her wife[—]
 The only harbour in my days of strife
 Was Mary[—]when the sea roiled mountains high
 When joy was lost & every sorrow rife
 To her sweet bosom I was wont to flye
 To undeceive by truth lifes treacherous agony.

(lines 273–81)

This stanza is taut with tension between line and syntax, with almost every line reading cogently both on its own and as part of a larger unit. Verbs that initially seem intransitive become transitive, dependent clauses turn out to be subjects of new sentences, and some phrases hover between two indeterminable possible functions.

In both these passages, the length of sentences and clauses varies, as do the relations between syntax and line and the rhythmic shape of lines and syntactic units. There is a sense that the center of energy is moving to a new location, line by line. The formal elevation of Clare’s Spenserian stanzas arises not from their diction or imagery, which are quotidian and familiar, but from the way the words are handled by the syntax as it turns around the edges of the lines. These effects are underscored by the complex, interweaving rhyme scheme and by his frequent use of alliteration and assonance. Just as Clare is fascinated by how Byron’s tropes of exile, ocean travel, and the refuge of romantic love can be made to apply to his own situation, he adapts Byron’s distinctive language to write his own version of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. “England my country,” he cries, in both Byron’s voice and his own. As with formal Church English and the vulgar sociolect of “Don Juan,” he makes use of a strand of English that was both well known to him and full of untapped resources. In doing so,

like all good translators, he "stretches the linguistic boundaries of [his] own language."⁴⁰

Moreover, as Clare collocates these versions of English, his native language reveals itself to be multiple rather than singular, changing over time and comprised at any moment of overlapping and competing dialects, idiolects, registers, and vernaculars. By moving words, constructions, and grammatical forms between different varieties of English, Clare focuses our attention not only on the generic attributes of language but also on the specific contours of particular strands of English and how they do, and do not, fit together. Elsewhere in his poetry, Scots and regional dialects are important for this exploration, as is the relation between these vernaculars and printed poetry going back to the sixteenth century.⁴¹ Over the course of his career, as Barbara M. H. Strang points out, "Clare writ many languages, sometimes separate, sometimes mixed so as to produce an almost macaronic effect within what is called English."⁴²

But in 1841, Clare immerses himself in the biblical paraphrases, "Don Juan," and "Child Harold." His devotion to them is sustained and intense, an endeavor of "creative" rather than "mechanical reading."⁴³ According to Derek Attridge, creative reading is an encounter with a text's particular inventiveness, its "singularity." The reader "work[s] against the mind's tendency to assimilate the other to the same, attending to that which can barely be heard, registering what is unique about the shaping of language, thought, and feeling in this particular work."⁴⁴ Going beyond merely appreciating the text, creative reading strives to "fathom its *modus operandi*, to achieve an accurate understanding of the repeatable rules according to which the work operates as a meaningful entity."⁴⁵ For writers, creative reading "often moves to an articulation in words, as if the work being read demanded a new work in response," "sometimes in the guise of imitations, translations, or extrapolations."⁴⁶ Attridge takes such reworkings as the paradigm for all artistic creation: "this process—the inventive work giving rise to the inventive response—is how *all* invention occurs."⁴⁷ Some translation theorists make similar arguments, discovering in works that foreground their origin in other texts the fundamental elements of all genuine engagements with literature, including writing. Clive Scott, for instance, defines translation as "a mode of reading which gives textual substance to reader response" and as "an existential need and condition of reading."⁴⁸ Scott argues that the achievement of a translation "lies not in the demonstration of a skill of substitution, but in the fruitfulness

of the relationship established between the ST [source text] and the target text (TT), and what that relationship sets in creative motion."⁴⁹ His term for creative reading is "reading-to-translate," and he thinks all readers should do it more often, regardless of whether the translation they perform is between their native language and a foreign tongue or between the printed text and a handwritten map of it.⁵⁰

One way of understanding Clare's rewritings, accordingly, is as a phenomenological record of an experience of writing as "an existential need and condition of reading." This experience is most legible in his biblical paraphrases, wherein reading and writing quite evidently occurred simultaneously as a unified process. Where reading stops and writing begins is difficult to say. As Clare versifies, he keeps some phrases intact, rewords and drops others, and inserts new words and ideas, some of which clarify, amplify, or interpret the sense of the source text and others of which seem quite independent of it. In his version of the opening verses of Revelation 22, for instance, he omits the Bible's references to "the Lamb" and "nations," and he slips in allusions to comfort and weariness. Clare's additions are shown in italics, phrases he moves to new positions are underlined, and rewordings are given in bold:

& he showed me a river in midst of the street
 Of the water of life clear as chrystal & pure
Flowing out **from** the throne of **the Lord**—*heaven sweet*
The weary to bless & the feeble to care
 & on **each** side the river *like comfort in thrall*
 The tree of life *grew as a blessing for all.*

(p. 156)

Each choice underscores some aspect of the meaning, symbolism, and pathos of the original, and taken together these choices transcribe an experience of reading. He scrutinizes and interprets his source text, setting aside ideas about sacrifice and emphasizing instead how the river sustains life and blesses everyone with the gift of pure, sweet water. He seeks to understand this local moment in the light of patterns of imagery and diction that run through the whole Bible. He interpolates himself into the text by repeating the first person pronoun "me" and by inserting his own concerns about weariness, imprisonment, and the promise of comfort.

As is typical throughout his paraphrases, nearly all of Clare's decisions heighten the emotional resonance of the passage. Of course, it is impossible to determine whether he actually felt weary, comforted, or neither, or whether the images of the river and the tree of life sparked awe, pleasure, or a mere desire that he (or his reader) feel awe or pleasure. But these particular feelings are brought strongly to the fore, and it seems reasonable to infer that they somehow played a role in his reading. As such, Clare's versifications testify to the importance of what Rachel Ablow calls "the feeling of reading." According to Ablow, in the nineteenth century in particular, "reading was commonly regarded as at least as valuable as an affective experience as it was as a way to ... increase understanding."⁵¹ Clare's poems suggest, indeed, that feeling was itself a way to deepen understanding of the text.

Moreover, for Ablow and other historians of reading, the pride of place once granted to emotion signals that in the past, to a greater degree than today, reading was conceived of "as a labour of the body."⁵² Karin Littau, for instance, argues that there is a profound "split between modern literary study, which tends to regard reading as a reducibly mental activity, and a tradition reaching back to antiquity which assumed that reading literature was not only about sense-making but also about sensation."⁵³ This emphasis on the affective, bodily dimension of reading also appears in translation studies. It is vital for Scott, who writes, "translation is about registering the text in my body, and, conversely, inscribing in text my bodily responses."⁵⁴ According to Douglas Robinson, translators are always guided by a subcognitive somatic expertise as they seek equivalent means of expression in the target language. What happens in practice, if rarely in theory, he says, is that a person "reads the SL [source language] text with an ear to translating it into a TL [target language] and charges the transfer with the force of his or her idiosomatic experience: *feels* the SL and works to dredge up out of his or her TL storehouse words that feel the same, words that seem charged with something like the same force."⁵⁵ Following Robinson, I think we can read Clare's biblical paraphrases as offering hints to the force that the words of the Bible exerted upon his body and his psyche. By analogy, "Don Juan" and, especially, the more successful "Child Harold" suggest how reading Byron inspired Clare to translate the characteristic impact of Byron's verse—rather than its content—into Clare's own terms.

The liberties Clare takes with the subject matter of *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* mean that the relationship between

reading and writing is encoded differently in the poems they inspired. In these cases, many of his strategies for marking that relationship resemble those of the answer poems and competitive verses that were a prominent part of the system of manuscript transmission. “[B]lank manuscript pages were an open invitation for people to compose and transcribe all sorts of texts,” explains Arthur F. Marotti, and scribes, compilers, owners, borrowers, and others responded by copying their own poetry into manuscript books.⁵⁶ Answer poems might refute, extend, imitate, or parody other works in the volume, or they might introduce a collection or leave a record of the names of owners or borrowers. Many answer poems were inscribed in a spirit of “competitive versifying,” and some of Clare’s seem to partake of this spirit.⁵⁷ Usually the contest is with someone other than Byron, but Clare does write in “Don Juan,” “I think myself as great a bard as Byron” (line 286). This bit of bluster conveys the posture of confidence and defiance that reading Byron seems to have kindled in Clare.⁵⁸

Clare actually copied five stanzas from “Child Harold” into his own copy of Byron’s *Works*.⁵⁹ They included the last three stanzas of one of the sequence’s lyrical interludes, the only one not called Song or Ballad: “Written in a Thunder storm July 15th 1841” (p. 48).⁶⁰ The poem reworks Byron’s “Stanzas Composed during a Thunder-storm,” changing the setting to the fen country, repurposing its themes of hopelessness and lost love, and strongly echoing lines from both that poem and the third canto of *Child Harold’s Pilgrimage*. This answer poem accomplishes many of the purposes Marotti lists, extending and imitating Byron as well as leaving a record of Clare’s ownership and use of the book.

Clare treated not only Byron’s published book but also his own works as manuscript compilations.⁶¹ “Child Harold” and “Don Juan” quote not only from their namesakes and other works by Byron but also from poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Alexander Pope, Cowper, and Wordsworth and from many popular songs, often signaling that these words are extracted from other works by placing them in quotation marks. Interspersed among the biblical paraphrases, too, are passages from other parts of the Bible and from various poems by Byron and John Dryden. Clare thus actually physically transcribes lines from his own poem into Byron’s book and copies bits and pieces from other books into his own compositions, both into the poems proper and into the otherwise empty spaces between stanzas and sections. As such, he leaves a paper trail demonstrating what the paraphrases and all literary translations make clear by their fidelity to their sources:

reading and writing are elements of a single activity. At the same time, he resurrects the customs of manuscript culture within a textual world dominated by print.

Byron and the Bible are well-chosen coconspirators in this project. The King James Bible may have been the Authorized Version, but it was also quite evidently “not the poetry of a single mind, nor the effusion of a singular vision, nor even the product of a single moment.”⁶² Translated from disparate texts composed in multiple foreign languages a long time ago, “the Bible is better described in terms of an on-going tradition of interpretation than as a specific individual work.”⁶³ Clare would have known this for many reasons, including his acquaintance with hymns by many songwriters such as Watts, whose *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) was one of the first books he owned; his evident study of Blair's and possibly Lowth's work; his admiration for George Horne's *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (1771); and his regular experience of attending church services in which scripture was read aloud and interpreted.⁶⁴ For his part, Byron had often been imitated and parodied, as Clare well knew. As early as 1824, Clare was collecting such imitations or, as he called them, “liknesses of Lord Byrons.”⁶⁵ In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*, moreover, Byron perfects an improvisational style that makes his poems seem not only spontaneous but also unfinished, open to being extended by new cantos.⁶⁶ The texts Clare rewrites were thus in meaningful ways already unclosed and unfixed, even though they were available to him in printed books. They also stood for prestigious, ongoing traditions of writing and reading. By rewriting them, he steps into those traditions and is enriched by them. To “insinuate innovation into the text itself,” as Michel de Certeau puts it, is always to insert one's work “into the terms of a tradition.”⁶⁷

That imitation and invention always overlap is something we as early twenty-first-century academics believe. It is also something that artists in Clare's day must surely have felt, whether instinctively through their own practice or more directly through contemporary debates about influence, plagiarism, and literary forgeries and frauds.⁶⁸ Clare had long been expert in these debates. He had been accused of plagiarism early on and sought thereafter to avoid such charges.⁶⁹ At the same time, he belonged to the *London Magazine* circle, for whom literary hoaxes were inside jokes—if one laughed, then one had a sophisticated view of the marketplace of print.⁷⁰ And he had well-founded opinions about print culture, which are legible, among other places, in his

denunciations of its practices and ethics in "Child Harold" and "Don Juan." "Real poets must be truly honest men," he writes in the first stanza of "Child Harold," which is to say they must be free from the humiliating desire for fame, "Tied to no mongrel laws on flatterys page," and independent of the "party rage" that dictates the responses of reviewers (lines 3–5). As several scholars have argued in a trenchant strain of criticism about these works, Clare strenuously resists the strictures of his "brand identity of the Northamptonshire Peasant Poet," as well as the larger political economy of nineteenth-century publishing and authorship.⁷¹ Aligning himself with Byron and the Bible was in part a way of rejecting a print marketplace of scoundrels and sycophants and choosing instead to participate in a textual culture of readers and writers.

Clare had ample experience with that sort of textual culture, too. His poems had been published by men who acted not only as printers and publicists but also as editors and even collaborators, doing everything from adding punctuation to deleting and rearranging large sections of text. Notwithstanding frequent tensions and a good deal more tidying up of Clare's manuscripts than most twenty-first-century readers would approve of, he trusted their opinions and valued their interventions, while they honored the unique features of his language and style.⁷² Moreover, as Mina Gorji has shown, his composing was always intimately connected to his reading.⁷³ Among both his earliest and latest works we find biblical paraphrases and imitations of Elizabethan songs, and in between there are poems in the style of Spenser, James Thomson, Robert Burns, James Beattie, and other writers. In practical terms, too, Clare was part of several overlapping coteries that circulated both handwritten poems and printed books through the post and by hand as gifts and loans. He partook, that is, in a textual culture that esteemed reading and writing and that intersected with, but was never identical to, the print market.

Indeed, Clare's rewriting projects of 1841 might suggest some ways in which we, as scholars of modern literature, could rethink our own conception of the relation between print and text. There has been a strong tendency to equate the two, and to attribute to textuality a series of propositions about printedness that are predicated on a dualism between print culture on the one hand and oral and manuscript cultures on the other. But historians of early modern literature have shown us how much more complicated the situation on the ground really was. Manuscript transmission and print publication coexisted for centuries, and

print adopted many features of manuscript culture, from coterie circulation to competitive versifying, answer poems, and other modes of modification and appropriation of earlier texts.⁷⁴ Likewise, scholars in translation studies have long grappled with the paradox according to which a translated text remains unfixed in time and in material form. The translation "is not reproduction," as George Szirtes writes; "it is something else that would not, however, exist without its original referent and pattern."⁷⁵ The power of print to fix texts seems less complete and simply different than we have tended to assume.

Something similar might also be said of the power of print to fix the oral language of speech and song. This issue takes us beyond the scope of this article, though not beyond the scope of Clare's rewritings, which also translate, as it were, among speech, song, and text. His biblical paraphrases often underscore the claims of the Old Testament to record the speech of the prophets, and he connects the lyrics of his own "Hebrew Melodies" and "Child Harold" to the real singing of hymnody and national song associated with Byron, Thomas Moore, and Burns. English literary studies for the most part treats poets' claims to make their texts song-like as proof that the literary text is governed entirely by the dominion of print, which offers writers techniques for creating the effect of orality rather than—as the poets would have us believe—for drawing actual vocal experience into their texts. But if we step back from the assumption that print fixes writing, taking seriously the insights of translation studies and the history of manuscript transmission, then we might also begin to question the assumption that the main thing print does to anything is fix it. We might investigate instead how texts both capture and invent voices, mediating between the many sounds of the living language authors hear around them—rather than the single strand of Received Pronunciation—and the many sounds readers hear in their turn. What Clare's manuscript translations of Byron and the Bible might ultimately show is how dynamic and vital the relation between English and English poetry really was and remains.

NOTES

I wish to thank Francesco Marco Aresu, Samuel Fallon, Sarah Houghton-Walker, and the English Department at Trinity College, Hartford for their generous assistance and support.

¹ John Clare, "Biblical Paraphrases," in *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837–1864*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon

Press, 1984), 1:105–58, 105. Subsequent references to the biblical phrases are to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text by page number.

² Clare, “Child Harold,” in *The Later Poems of John Clare*, 1:40–88; and Clare, “Don Juan a Poem,” in *The Later Poems of John Clare*, 1:89–102. Subsequent references to “Child Harold” and “Don Juan” are to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text by line number.

³ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 24.

⁴ Mark Minor, “Clare, Byron, and the Bible: Additional Evidence from the Asylum Manuscripts,” *BRH* 85, 1 (Spring 1982): 104–26, 118. For Clare’s use of sublimity, see Sarah Houghton[–Walker], “‘Enkindling ecstasy’: The Sublime Vision of John Clare,” *Romanticism* 9, 2 (July 2003): 176–95; and Houghton-Walker, *John Clare’s Religion* (Farnham UK: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 133–49.

⁵ Roger Sales, *John Clare: A Literary Life*, Literary Lives, gen. ed. Richard Dutton (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 144–58, 148. See also Houghton-Walker, *John Clare’s Religion*.

⁶ Stephen Prickett, “Language within Language: The King James Steamroller,” in *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences*, ed. Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 27–44, 39.

⁷ Ann Jefferson, “Genius and Its Others,” *Paragraph* 32, 2 (July 2009): 182–96, 186.

⁸ Fredrick Burwick, “Romantic Theories of Translation,” *WC* 39, 3 (Summer 2008): 68–74, 71. For more on the Romantic elevation of foreignizing literary translations, see Peter France and Kenneth Haynes, preface to *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English, Vol. 4: 1790–1900*, ed. France and Haynes, gen. eds. France and Stuart Gillespie, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), pp. xiii–xv, xiii; L. G. Kelly, *The True Interpreter: A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), pp. 49–50; and Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, introduction to *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Schulte and Biguenet (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 1–10, 3–4. For the distinction between foreignizing and domesticating translations, see Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2d edn. (New York: Routledge, 2008), esp. pp. 1–34 and 83–124.

⁹ Andrew Elfenbein, *Romanticism and the Rise of English* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2009), p. 16.

¹⁰ See Suzanne Romaine, introduction to *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Vol. IV: 1776–1997*, ed. Romaine, gen. ed. Richard M. Hogg, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 1–56, esp. pp. 7–8 and 15–6; and Sylvia Adamson, “Literary Language,” in *Cambridge History of the English Language*, 4:589–692.

¹¹ On Clare’s manuscripts, see Tim Chilcott, introduction to *John Clare: The Living Year, 1841*, by Clare, ed. Chilcott (Nottingham UK: Trent Editions, 1999), pp. vii–xvii.

¹² Gerald L. Bruns, “The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture,” *CL* 32, 2 (Spring 1980): 113–29, 125.

¹³ Bruns, p. 125.

¹⁴ Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), p. 153.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 5.

¹⁶ J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 19 and 16.

¹⁷ Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), p. 4.

¹⁸ Hugo Friedrich, "On the Art of Translation," trans. Schulte and Biguenet, in *Theories of Translation*, pp. 11–6, 13.

¹⁹ See David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), p. 5.

²⁰ Murray Roston, *Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 13. See also Norton, pp. 89–103.

²¹ Houghton-Walker, *John Clare's Religion*, p. 116.

²² See Houghton-Walker, *John Clare's Religion*, p. 116.

²³ Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. G. Gregory (London: Joseph T. Buckingham, 1815), p. 259. Among the examples Lowth offers is this one from Isaiah 60:1–3:

Arise, be thou enlightened; for thy light is come;
 And the glory of JEHOVAH is risen upon thee.
 For behold darkness shall cover the earth;
 And a thick vapour the nations:
 But upon thee shall JEHOVAH arise;
 And his glory upon thee shall be conspicuous.

(pp. 259–60)

For more on parallelism in biblical poetry, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, rev. edn. (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

²⁴ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1841), p. 561.

²⁵ Blair, p. 564.

²⁶ Houghton-Walker, *John Clare's Religion*, p. 116.

²⁷ Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005), p. 152.

²⁸ Blair, p. 557.

²⁹ Clare, *John Clare by Himself*, ed. Eric Robinson and Powell (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 5.

³⁰ Clare, *John Clare by Himself*, p. 193.

³¹ All biblical quotations are from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Prickett (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997).

³² Hamlin and Jones, "Introduction: The King James Bible and Its Reception History," in *The King James Bible after 400 Years*, pp. 1–24, 10.

³³ George M. Ridenour, *The Style of "Don Juan"* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 125; and Catherine Addison, "'Ottava Rima' and Novelistic Discourse," *JNTJournal* 34, 2 (Summer 2004): 133–45, 139.

³⁴ Mark Storey, *The Problem of Poetry in the Romantic Period* (Houndmills UK: Macmillan, 2000), p. 161; and Chilcott, "A Real World & Doubting Mind":

A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare (Hull UK: Hull Univ. Press, 1985), p. 152.

³⁵ George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, vol. 5 of *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980–93), canto 15, line 667.

³⁶ On uses of vulgar dictionaries by gentlemen and novelists, see Janet Sorensen, “Vulgar Tongues: Canting Dictionaries and the Language of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in “Critical Networks,” special issue, *ECS* 37, 3 (Spring 2004): 435–54; and Gary R. Dyer, “Reading as a Criminal in Early Nineteenth-Century Fiction,” *WC* 35, 3 (Summer 2004): 141–6.

³⁷ See Chilcott, introduction to *John Clare*, pp. x–xiv.

³⁸ On time and space in “Child Harold” and Clare’s later poems more generally, see Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, *Clare’s Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), pp. 86–121.

³⁹ Clare modifies the Spenserian stanza by changing the final alexandrine into a pentameter. Clare was perfectly capable of writing proper Spenserian stanzas and did so both before and after “Child Harold.” On Clare’s use of the Spenserian stanza throughout his poetry, see Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 77–96.

⁴⁰ Schulte and Biguenet, introduction to *Theories of Translation*, p. 9.

⁴¹ See Barbara M. H. Strang, “Appendix 1: John Clare’s Language,” in *The Rural Muse, Poems*, by Clare, ed. R. K. R. Thornton, 2d edn. (Ashington UK: Mid Northumberland Arts Group and Carcanet New Press, 1982), pp. 159–73, 168.

⁴² Strang, p. 159.

⁴³ Attridge, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Attridge, p. 80.

⁴⁵ Attridge, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Attridge, pp. 92 and 91.

⁴⁷ Attridge, p. 92.

⁴⁸ Clive Scott, *Literary Translation and the Rediscovery of Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 10 and 3.

⁴⁹ Scott, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Scott, p. 10.

⁵¹ Rachel Ablow, introduction to *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, ed. Ablow (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2010), pp. 1–10, 2.

⁵² Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies, and Bibliomania* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁵³ Littau, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Scott, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Douglas Robinson, *The Translator’s Turn* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 21–2.

⁵⁶ Marotti, p. 171.

⁵⁷ Marotti, p. 161.

⁵⁸ See William D. Brewer, “John Clare and Lord Byron,” *JCSJ* 11 (July 1992): 43–56, 53.

⁵⁹ Anne Barton, “John Clare Reads Lord Byron,” *Romanticism* 2, 2 (July 1996): 127–48, 143.

⁶⁰ He also copied this poem into a draft of an unsent letter to Mary Joyce. See Clare to Joyce, [May] 1841, in *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 646–7, 646n1.

⁶¹ Minor calls the manuscripts “a kind of commonplace book” (p. 105).

⁶² Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), p. xii.

⁶³ Prickett, *Origins of Narrative: The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press: 1996), p. xi. See also Norton: “Since the Bible, the PB [Prayer Book] and the singing Psalter were often bound together, it would not be uncommon to have within the covers of one volume as many as five different versions of a Psalm, two prose and three verse” (p. 76).

⁶⁴ On Clare's familiarity with Isaac Watts, see Gorji, p. 105. Gorji also explains that “Clare was familiar with the version of the Psalms translated by [Myles] Coverdale and printed in the Book of Common Prayer” (p. 105). On Clare's admiration for George Horne's *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, see Houghton-Walker, *John Clare's Religion*, p. 142. Clare himself writes, “the book that has given me most satisfaction since my late illness has been Horn on the Psalms & it is one of the very best books I have ever met with” (Clare to Marianne Marsh, Helpstone, 6 July 1831, in *The Letters of John Clare*, pp. 543–4, 544).

⁶⁵ Clare, *John Clare by Himself*, p. 198. See also a journal entry from 1825, in which he receives “some verses said to be written by Lord Byron they are in his manner” (p. 214.) Clare also drafted mock “advertisements” for forgeries or hoaxes of “new” poems by Byron. See Brewer, pp. 52–3; and Storey, *The Problem of Poetry*, p. 160.

⁶⁶ See Jeffrey C. Robinson, “Romantic Poetry: The Possibilities for Improvisation,” *WC* 38, 3 (Summer 2007): 94–100.

⁶⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), p. 175.

⁶⁸ See Tilar J. Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period*, Material Texts, ed. Roger Chartier, Joan DeJean, Joseph Farrell, Anthony Grafton, Janice Radway, and Peter Stallybrass (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Michael Wiley, “Romantic Amplification: The Way of Plagiarism,” *ELH* 75, 1 (Spring 2008): 219–40; and Margaret Russett, *Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760–1845*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism, gen. ed. Marilyn Butler and James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006).

⁶⁹ See Gorji, pp. 19–21; and Mazzeo, pp. 176–80.

⁷⁰ See Richard Cronin, “John Clare and the *London Magazine*,” in *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture, and Community*, ed. Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), pp. 209–27; and John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 28–33.

⁷¹ Jason N. Goldsmith, “The Promiscuity of Print: John Clare's ‘Don Juan’ and the Culture of Romantic Celebrity,” *SEL* 46, 4 (Autumn 2006): 803–32, 816. See also Gary Harrison, “Hybridity, Mimicry, and John Clare's *Child Harold*,” *WC* 34, 3 (Summer 2003): 149–55; and Lynn Pearce's superb “John Clare's ‘Child Harold’: A Polyphonic Reading,” *Criticism* 31, 2 (Spring 1989): 139–57.

⁷² For a balanced and insightful account of Clare's relationship with his publishers, see Sales, pp. 66–75. For a strong argument that that relationship was one of coauthorship, see Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 206–61.

⁷³ See Gorji. See also Goodridge; and Adam Rounce, "John Clare, William Cowper, and the Eighteenth Century," in *New Essays on John Clare*, pp. 38–56. Clare's relationship with poets who influenced and inspired him has been a difficult subject for criticism to grapple with in part because we have been locked into interpretive frameworks in which imitation and originality are a zero-sum game.

⁷⁴ For the persistence of manuscript culture alongside print, see H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). For the adoption of aspects of manuscript culture in print, see Matthew Zarnowiecki, *Fair Copies: Reproducing the English Lyric from Tottel to Shakespeare* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2014). See Susan J. Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010), for various specific "instances where a Romantic 'author' gets created, as a literary consciousness, in a web of reciprocally transforming and transformative creative subjects" (p. 2).

⁷⁵ George Szirtes, "Cloud Talk: Reading the Shapes in Poetry and What Becomes of Them," in *Literary Translation: Redrawing the Boundaries*, ed. Jean Boase-Beier, Antoinette Fawcett, and Philip Wilson (Houndmills UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 50–63, 59.